

THE ASYLUM

Quarterly Journal of the Numismatic Bibliomania Society

Volume I, Number 4

Summer 1981

CONCLUSION OF TALK BY "LEATHER FREAK" JOHN J. FORD, JR. AT 1980 ANA BIBLIOMANIA MEETING

There are so many angles in discussing numismatic literature that it's hard to know which direction to pursue in the time given. Rather than ramble on, and encourage some of you to get up and go for a walk, does anybody have any questions which might lead to a little discussion?

DICK JOHNSON: Let's say you were giving this speech fifty years from now. You get up before a group of numismatists. All of us here love books, some of us have written books. . . .

FORD: Me? Up in fifty years? You have longevity pills or something?

JOHNSON: Wait until I get to the punch line. Okay. We all love books. We all know what's going on in the library field of book publishing. What would we be looking at fifty years from now? Would we be sitting at a console and getting all our information from a centralized computer, located perhaps at ANA headquarters? Think ahead and then look back.

FORD: That's so difficult Dick. Technology changes so fast. I don't think that the book as we have known it, or as the world has known it for many hundreds of years, is going to disappear. A very close friend of mine (he's in this room) is already putting numismatic data into a computer with tremendous success. However, the type of information he's putting into the computer lends itself to being computerized. I'm collecting data, for instance, on assayers. I'm making up form sheets with the years from 1850 to 1900 going down the column on one side, then it has space for names and addresses and locations, and where I get the information, across. The trouble with the computer is that every time that you want the information, you have to run a print-out. This gets a little complicated.

What really bothers me about where we will be fifty years from now is the poor quality of the paper used to print most of the books today. According to authorities in the Library of Congress, there is a self-destruct fabric built into the paper that's being used today. John Satenstein, my son-in-law, is here tonight. He's in the publishing business and he is very well acquainted with paper.

Going to extremes, we have the world coin and paper money catalogues published by Krause, which are printed on pulp. Well, they have to come out with a new edition every year because after two or three years the paper will start to go. It will be like a copy of *Coin World*. If you want to save an article from *Coin World* and keep it in pristine condition, you have to de-acidify it or have it reprinted on paper with less acid content. Because of the cost today of composition, printing, labor, binding, and everything else, including our economic situation, there is a tendency towards using cheap paper. The idea is to sell a lot of books to a lot of people, without giving a damn whether they will last. I'm wondering how many books that you buy for ten, twenty or thirty dollars will last for fifty years. Now, if you keep them in a dry place, and at a temperature of around sixty-five degrees with low humidity, and you're lucky, they will survive. The pulp publications definitely will not. The acidic content is just too high. I've saved clippings from *Coin World* going back to 1960. The ones that I've kept in folders are very fragile, but they have maintained their color. The ones that have laid on stacks in folders exposed to the air are now brittle, and I have to make Xeroxes very carefully and destroy the originals. The Xerox, of course, is on bond paper with at least some rag content, so it will last as long as I will. Where we are going I can't tell you.

I have a close relationship with the Barrow shop which specializes in the treatment and preservation of paper. They have worked, for example, on the United States Constitution and the Declaration of Independence. It might interest you to know that in 1940, some nitwit working for the United States Government, where a lot of nitwits end up, "repaired" the Constitution of the United States with Scotch tape! The glue used in the original Minnesota Mining Scotch Tape breaks down chemically and the oil leaches into the paper. The tape itself can be removed by using acetone or toluene but the stain is extremely difficult to remove. The Barrow people have discovered a way to do it but it is extremely dangerous. The chemicals used have to be heated to a certain temperature. If they are overheated by a few degrees, the chemicals reach flash point, and a few degrees above that and boom! The windows go out. Maybe you go out.

I bought a magnificent copy of Low's work on Hard Times tokens, the second edition, with the supplement. It had a couple of tears in it and they were mended with Scotch tape. Now, I've got to do something about that. And you say, "Well, come on. Get rid of it. Sell it to some guy that doesn't know what Scotch tape is." Well, I can't do that. Why? I've got Lyman Low's own copy, with his corrections in it. It's loaded with newspaper clippings and old ads. It's a priceless book, and it has to be preserved. So down to Barrow it has to go, and they have to take the Scotch tape off.

MARGO RUSSELL: John, I would like to remind everybody that *Coin World* is on microfilm.

FORD: Well, between you and me (and I don't mean to be disparaging), I don't like microfilm. I've used it. I've used it in Birmingham. I've used it in London. I've used it in Washington. I've used it in New York. I find it awkward. There's something "mechanical" about it; I don't know what it is. I prefer to have the book

or pamphlet. I like bindings. I'm not going to mention the kind of bindings again, because there are clowns waiting for another opportunity. I just like books!

If there is something in *Coin World* that is super, as I said before, I'll Xerox it on the best paper available. If it's something outstanding, and it's been reprinted, I try very hard to get a copy of the reprint. John Satenstein has told me that a lot of coated stock is really crummy paper protected. It is coated for two reasons: It gives a much better rendition of halftones; the dots look a lot better sitting on top of the coating, rather than soaking into the normally porous paper and getting muddy looking. And on top of that, the coating keeps the air away from the high acid content paper inside, which retards the self-destruction process. For these two basic reasons I would, if I were in the publishing business, print 200 or 500 copies of any book I published on *Permatext*. It's an expensive paper but it's guaranteed to last 500 to 1000 years, or at least it's chemically inert. Once the book is on the press, feeding in a different paper is just a question of a little adjustment and a little work. The important thing is that copies would survive.

Unfortunately, a lot of people in the publishing business are in it primarily, no, completely, to make money. The results bother me. You can see it in the bindings. Now, I'm not referring to the fact that it's covered with the cheapest possible imitation leather, or that it doesn't have tail bands, or even the fact that the paper is crummy. The binding is such that if you open the book and try to lay it flat so that you can read it, the thing wants to close itself. If you really flatten it out, you spring the binding. You break it. The next time you pick it up, the pages fall out.

GUEST: Isn't that a "perfect" binding?

FORD: Well, there is a type of binding called a "perfect" binding. The regular Garrett sale catalogues, for example, are perfect bound. Now, perfect binding lies flat, but, unfortunately, it cannot be mishandled. I thought that the Garrett catalogues were well done, but not done well enough to take the abuse of constant use. Perfect bindings are now sewn. The spine is glued together with an additive along the edge, which permits it to lay flat. A sewn binding will lay flat and withstand heavy use.

All of these things are expensive. The name of the game today is to make money. Now, that gets to pricing. The problem is that you need distribution. If you went to college, it's called marketing. The technique today is to gauge what the potential market is. Then, you put a telephone number price on the book, so that you can sell it for fifty percent off to the dealer, who then resells it for double his cost. Now, the dealer (Boy, do I like dealers!) wants to make more money than the guy that wrote the book. He wants to make more money than the guy who printed the book. He wants to make more money than the guy who published the book. What does he do for all this? He just *schlepps* the book to somebody and takes the money. It means that the middle man makes more money than the authors. I think that the authors and the publishers need more encouragement than the peddlers, so that we can get more and better books. Walter Breen, for instance, wrote a terrific book on United States proof coins. I'm sure that Walter had nothing to do with the marketing of the book. He authored the book. He probably proofread it. He

probably went over the illustrations. The quality of the book is very good, and it's a heck of a book. Everybody interested in United States coins should own a copy. However, the distribution of that book was weird. If you subscribed to somebody's numismatic advisory service, you could get a free copy of Walter's book. Someone else would sell you a whole bunch of books, most of which was garbage, but if you bought it all, you would get a copy of Walter's book. We don't have a nice, clean system of distribution of new books.

Then, you can go to the other extreme. For example, somebody recently wrote a book on the Bank of Pensacola, Florida. It covered everything to do with banking in Pensacola, including obsolete banknotes, national banknotes, the banks themselves, pictures of the banks, a map of the city, the whole works. The author published this out of his own pocket, and printed 250 or 500 copies. He sent a notice to *Coin World*, ran a little ad somewhere, and sold them direct. No distributors, no brokers, no dealers. Books such as this are hard to find. In my experience, the best books written are the ones written as a labor of love, which are published by the author at his own expense. The worst motivation for publishing a book is pure profit.

Most of the publishing houses don't actually publish their own books. If you go to a big book publisher in New York, you'll find that their operation consists of a couple of offices, some editors, an art director, and a couple of flits. These people talk to you, and they project how many books they can sell, how many in hardcover, how many in softcover, how many this, how many that. They edit your manuscript, they pick the type, and they go over the illustrations. They do little else beyond that.

I'm involved now in helping a young author who has written a very comprehensive book. He wants to get it published. He went to a major publishing house in New York, and they agreed to do the book. But the publishing house thinks only of dollars! This book is arranged with illustrations throughout the text. The publishers want to take all of the illustrations, and put them together on sixteen pages in the middle of the book. Now, that's ridiculous! Right? Everybody agrees that it is ridiculous, but the publisher felt that it was cheaper. And cheaper is the name of the game. He can make more money, the wholesaler can make more money, and the retailer can make more money, and we end up with a crummier book.

On the other hand, the quality of the material coming out today is impressive. For example, the Krause book on world coins is certainly a fantastic reference book. I just wish that every few years Chet would put out an edition of 500 or so copies printed on paper that will last. It might have to sell for fifty or sixty dollars, but I know that I, for one, would certainly buy a copy.

JOHN ADAMS: In 1950, you wrote an article for the *Numismatist* giving rarity information on the twenty-two large-size Chapman catalogues with plates. Walter Breen was the cataloguer for a 1970 Harmer Rooke sale that listed part of the Henry Chapman inventory. In some instances, Walter's rarity data disagrees with yours, and, in other cases, my experiences with the Chapman catalogues are in conflict with both of your findings.

WALTER BREEN: I will clue you, John. An awful lot of that material was edited or modified from my own cataloguing by Don Taxay, who, at that time, headed the firm of Harmful, Crook – excuse me, Harmer, Rooke and Company. I mean, then it was ghastly! I was left with a nervous breakdown. They tried to get me to come back, but I said that I couldn't afford another breakdown.

ADAMS: So, you claim no pride in authoring the catalogue?

BREEN: None whatever!

ADAMS: What about your data, John?

FORD: My data of thirty years ago reflects the knowledge and experience of a twenty-six-year-old “expert”. I collected Chapman catalogues, and my rarity comments in the August 1950 *Numismatist* were predicated upon two things: the number of catalogues that were remaining in Henry Chapman's inventory when the estate was purchased by Edmund Rice in 1948, and my own experience from roughly 1946 to 1950 in trying to find various copies to complete my set. I didn't complete my own set until 1951, and, strangely enough, the last one I got, the Baldwin, was not that rare. Since then, I've seen quite a few Baldwin's.

There was an article in *COINage Magazine* a month or two back about the ten most valuable United States coins. The article was crummy, but it illustrated the fact that we confuse “most valuable” with “rarest”. And I confused it in 1950. In that respect, my article was also crummy. The rarest Chapman catalogue is not necessarily the most valuable as a research tool. Are we going to value a catalogue based upon how difficult it is to find, or upon how useful it is to some dealer who wants it to use in properly describing an obscure item.

Some of the rarest United States auction catalogues are worthless to the researcher. I can think of an 1858 sale that said, “1793. Cent....1805. Cent,” and so forth. My God! It says nothing. Even priced, it still says nothing, because the coins sold for three cents.

Now, in my experience, the Chapman catalogue that I use the most is the Bushnell sale. This catalogue is loaded with the most obscure tokens and medals, and items that you can't find anyplace else. I have two copies of the Bushnell sale with buyers' names written in. One is Henry Chapman's bid book, and the other was Dave Proskey's auction room copy. Proskey not only wrote down who bought the lots, but also whether the guy was a jerk or a drunk. His written comments were hilarious.

In 1951, I wrote an article for the *Coin Collectors Journal*, solely on the Chapmans' sale of the Bushnell collection. To give you an idea of how different it was from the Garrett sales or Auction '80, the first thing that they did in an auction sale back in 1882, which was the year that the Bushnell sale took place, was to cover the entire floor with canvas. Now, if Walter Breen knew about this, he never would have gone to one of those sales! After the floor was covered, they would bring in all the chairs. Then, they would bring in two spittoons for each row. Ninety percent of the people who attended the Bushnell sale chewed tobacco. They didn't smoke

pipes or cigars; they chewed. And the great sport was aiming for the spittoon. The canvas, obviously, was there to protect the carpeting. Bidders sitting in the back row would make snide remarks, such as, "That one has shoe polish on it," which was an actual remark made at the Bushnell sale, referring to a 1794 cent that was dark black. The auctioneers ignored this stuff. In one of the auction sales of the time, an actual fistfight broke out over this type of thing.

BREEN: It broke out over a 1793 strawberry leaf cent.

FORD: It might have been a Lyman Low sale, but I'm not sure. In the early 1940s, Tom Elder told me about Lyman Low and his auction sales. Low had no auctioneer, and he would sit up there alone working the book. He had a bottle of gin, and every ten or fifteen lots, he would reach underneath the desk and take a shot from a bottle of gin. The further into the sale, the better it got, because Low couldn't read the bids of the mail bidders. So, if you stayed to the end of the sale, you could pick up some real good stuff, because Low would forget to protect the lots that he didn't have bids on. He'd be so full of gin that he would foul it up. I guess that the coin business was more human then.

The Bushnell sale is not the rarest Chapman, but its price is very high because of its reference value. Some of the plated, large-size Chapman sales that are very difficult to find, such as the Siedlecki, are next to worthless because they only have certain foreign coins, and only one or two United States coins of merit. Another invaluable catalogue is the Jenks sale. This sale is both rare with plates, and important as a research tool. That's why it commands the money it does.

Even if you try as I do, to stay on the straight and narrow path, and use a book for its reference value, it is easy to get off on tangents and start buying special editions, interleaved copies, presentation copies, and so forth. I find that I have a desire to own everything published, including books that I know I'll never use. Some years ago, when I was down at Harry Bass' house, he handed me something that looked like a telephone book and said, "Have you seen this one?" It was written some years ago by a nice lady in Florida, by the name of Jean Cohen, and it dealt with Lincoln cent errors. It was called, *The Encyclopedia of Fidology*, and it identified over seven thousand Lincoln cent errors, with over six thousand hand drawn illustrations. It shows cuds, rimbreaks, flyspecks, and who the hell knows what else. The whole book is full of Lincoln cent variables. Now, why do I have this book? I've never even opened it!

BASS: You're confessing right now to what you damned an hour ago — Bibliomania!!

FORD: I'll tell you why I bought that book. How do I know that someday I might not get a collection of twenty-two thousand Lincoln cent die varieties? I've got to be able to attribute them! But, that day won't ever come. I also have books on sales tax tokens, another topic that leaves me cold. I even have the book that someone wrote on medals issued during the bicentennial of Massachusetts. I just want to say that I have as complete a library on United States coins as is possible

for one to get. I really collect books as they come out, which means that I really collect knowledge.

GUEST: The question really is: Do you have a Bushnell catalogue without tobacco stains?

FORD: No. Back in 1951, the prolific Walter Breen worked for a short while for the American Numismatic Society. He started to make a list of United States Colonial coins, and the auctions that they appeared in. The idea, if carried to its ultimate, would result in an index of all the important items in American sale catalogues. This would be one hell of a job, but it's something that I hope we will see in the next ten or fifteen years. In other words, we should computerize the important items that have been sold at auction from roughly 1860 to date. This would primarily be of value in ascertaining how many specimens are known, and to a great extent, in tracing pedigrees. Dave Akers has done this in his series on United States gold coins.

It's unfortunate that we can't have some kind of a surtax in the industry on all of this wheeling, dealing, these million dollar deals, these hundred-thousand dollar coins that would draw off some of this money, and use it for basic research. We don't even have a list of American auction sales, although John Adams is working on such a book. If I understand it correctly, it will basically be a listing of all nineteenth century catalogues. He's going to list every catalogue, the date of the sale, the number of lots, who the cataloguer was, and so forth. For those dealers whose careers started in the nineteenth century, such as the Chapmans and Lyman Low, Adams' book will list their catalogues all the way to the end of their careers in the twentieth century.

MARGO RUSSELL: John, what are your thoughts about insuring books against loss by fire, or perhaps theft?

FORD: I'll tell you the truth. I'm building a new home, and one of the things that I'm concerned with is the protection of my library. The technology exists today, which was developed to protect computers, that will prevent fires in an airtight space. If the library room has windows, they are fixed windows that can't be opened; the door has neophrene gaskets that can be closed on rollers automatically in the event of fire. With heat or smoke detection equipment in the room, the slightest evidence of combustion will release a gas which will flood the room so that nothing can burn. This gas is non-toxic. This will protect the library. As far as insurance goes, I'm not a great believer in it, because you're dealing with items that cannot be replaced. Insurance gives you some money, but if I lived through the next fifty Kolbe sales, I could never replace what I have now. For example, I've got heavily annotated copies, such as Low's copy of Low, and J.N.T. Levick's copy of Low. They're the two foremost authorities on Hard Times tokens, and these copies couldn't be replaced. So, you insure to the extent that you can buy insurance, which is what I do, and you keep your fingers crossed. I think that protection is far more important than insurance.

GUEST: Are there many instances where burglars have taken numismatic books?

FORD: They only steal Gutenberg Bibles, or other well known rarities. Books are heavy, and burglars are not bright enough to know which are the right books to take. However, thefts from public libraries are another matter. The American Numismatic Society, for example, had problems up until a couple of years ago, with guys wearing heavy overcoats on warm days! They would go up to the ANS library, and take books out underneath their coats. Now, you have to sign in, and leave your coats and bags at the desk.

When I was with New Netherlands, the ANS librarian would call me up every two or three years and want to buy a copy of Miller/Ryder's *State Coinages of New England*, which was originally published by the ANS in 1920. It was the most popular book in the ANS library. Someone would steal a copy at least every eighteen months. To my knowledge, they must have bought ten copies from me alone in the twenty years I was with New Netherlands. Some people think that stealing books is like cheating insurance companies, or cheating your local banker. They think that it's all right. They borrow a book, forget about it, and then they keep it. It goes into their library. Maybe that's why collecting books becomes a mania. There are a lot of odd things connected with it.

One last point: I wanted to say something about bindings. There is an outfit in New York called Talas Library Service. Talas sells you anything that you could possibly need for the preservation and repair of a book. One of the greatest discoveries that I ever made was Talas. Through self-experimentation and talking with the people at Talas, I found ways to preserve and protect my leather bindings that were cracked or peeling. I originally started with Lexol, which both deacidifies the leather and puts neatsfoot oil and lanolin back into it. Then, I became more advanced. I bought the potassium lactate solution from Talas, and separately deacidified the leather, and then I put the oils back into it. Soon, I started buying ordinary oil pigments from art shops, and mixed it with linseed oil. I've got to the point now, that if you give me a crummy leather binding, I can restore it to the degree that it looks brand new. Talas also sells methyl acetate, which is the finest glue for repairing paper. I use it for repairing banknotes, too. It's fantastic! Then, they sell tissue for repairing torn pages in numerous different textures, colors, and shades. I've repaired pages in books, and I can't even locate the tear. A lot of my information came from Barrow, who also repairs books and documents. It's not called repair. It's called restoration. If it doesn't look like it's been repaired, it's been restored. If it looks like it's been repaired, it's been repaired. This is something that you do as a labor of love. Bookbinders do a so-so job, because they're strictly commercial. You can't pay a guy enough for the time and effort I spend on restoring a book.

I recently received my Fall-Winter issue of the *Asylum*, and want to congratulate you for this fine issue. To me, the highlight was the article, *Woodward vs. Frossard*, by John W. Adams. It was especially interesting to me because I have most of the catalogues mentioned and was able to get them out and check the parts referred to.

Those who enjoyed reading of this verbal battle would, I am sure, also love to read of the grading dispute between dealers Cogan and Mason, which appeared in the November and December issues of the *American Journal of Numismatics*. This subject is especially timely with the present controversy over the Mint State 60 through 69 grades.

Keep up the good work, and I shall look forward to receiving future issues of the *Asylum*.

Dave Hirt

While attending the ANA Convention in Cincinnati last August I picked up Vol. 1, No. 1 of a new publication "The Asylum." Reading the objectives of this publication, I noted they were very lofty. This new publication seemed to be something that I may have an interest in as I believe that I have made a contribution to the field of numismatic literature. I did not, however, "sign up."

At the recent convention of Early American Coppers Club, Inc., who incidentally publishes the leading numismatic publication "Penny-Wise," I was given a Xerox copy of the article "A Review of Half-Cent Literature" from No. 2 & 3 of "The Asylum." After careful reading of this article, I am of the opinion that the lofty objections [objectives ? ed.] so profoundly set forth in issue No. 1 are in fact so low that they are beneath whale dung on the ocean floor.

My conclusion is not based on the subject matter of the article, nor do I have any quarrel with the named author of the article, but it is the editors [sic] note which caused me to reach this conclusion. In my opinion the editor has breached the tenets [sic] of fair play with his note. He has continued a pattern of foul play which I and many many others have observed over the 10 year period since I took "pen in hand" to

do something about the 20 year hiatus for the publication of a standard reference on half cents. I am referring to the fact that from certain self-proclaimed and non-productive "numismatic literary scholars" there is a constant refusal to even acknowledge the publication of AMERICAN HALF CENTS in 1971!! The editor continues this charade in his note! Since many of his potential readers have knowledge of AMERICAN HALF CENTS, the editor attempts to justify his bias by stating that the article was written "circa 1966."

A careful reading of the article contradicts the editors [sic] caveat and leads the reader to the conclusion that either the editor is a liar in naming the author, or as an alternative the alleged [sic] author was a seer. This conclusion which we arrived at while at the EAC meeting is based on the following excerpt from the article on page 36.

"Ebenezer Gilbert completed a very uneven manuscript The Gilbert book long REMAINED (emphasis [sic] supplied) the standard reference, despite lacking a rational emission sequence, lacking reasonable historical material, lacking a usable rarity scale, and having inaccurate descriptions, typographical errors which in some cases destroyed the meaning of the sentences containing them, and plate errors."

In 1966 Gilbert was the standard reference on half cents, so how could the named author use the past tense for something that was in the future? His concluding paragraph on page 38 of the article makes it clear he did not consider the Bowers & Rudy [sic] work to be the standard reference on half cents.

We also noted that all the lacks and errors of the Gilbert book are not present in my book. If the editor of "The Asylum" were an editor with some knowledge rather than self-proclaimed expertise and not a liar and a bigot he would have indicated the existence of the PRESENT standard work on half cents. However, he did not do this. To do so would have been in keeping with the lofty objectives of "The Asylum" . . . The editor belongs to the depths to which these objectives have sunk. He should be there also as a coprophagist.

P.S. For a 1966 article the statement in regard to the LATE Joseph Brobston must be a "typographical error." If memory serves me correctly, his date of death was in 1972!

I'm sure this letter will never appear on the pages of "The Asylum" without editing!!

Roger S. Cohen, Jr.

The bibliographic article printed over my name in THE ASYLUM, Vol. 1, No. 2-3, is actually excerpted from my unpublished ms. on half cents, written 1953-56, completed 1956, revised 1965-66; the revision was not completed because of (among other things) prolonged serious illness, and renewed doubt

that I could ever bring it up to date. That reference to "the late Joseph Brobston" is from a penciled annotation made in 1972 when I learned of his death. It follows that when I wrote the quoted material, Roger Cohen's 1971 book was not even a gleam in someone's eye; and in 1972 I had not yet seen a copy, but if I had, I would not then have added it to this bibliographic section, as I believed my own book project dead and buried.

So much for coprophagy and similar indoor sports.

Now that the facts are in, the parties concerned may bury their hatchets wherever they please, so long as it is not anywhere in my anatomy; I have no part in this quarrel.

Yours in the name of truth,

Walter Breen

*In my opinion, American Half Cents is
what a coprophagist would wrap his lunch in!*

Editor

KATEN AUCTION SETS RECORD PRICES

Frank and Laurese Katen report that numismatic literature stole the spotlight in their 53rd sale dated April 24-25, 1981. Some of the highlights include: Adolph Cahn's auction sales No. 69 at \$90.00; Louis Ciani's sale of Oct. 30, 1920 at \$30.00. Other European auction sale catalogues of note include a large group of J. Schulman sales, lots 397 through 484 in the sale, which sold to a floor bidder for \$1,600.00.

Snowden's 1860 classic on the U.S. Mint collection fetched \$279.00 against an estimate of \$225.00. Heyden's bilingual classic on Italian orders and decorations brought \$110.00 and Loubat's well known work on American medals realized \$265.00.

American auction catalogues continued to be strong and much sought after. Mehl, Stack's, Kosoff and New Netherlands sales, report the Katens, fetched over 20 percent higher than in their previous sales. A large group of early sales, a continuation of the Wylie Hoard offering, sold mostly to floor bidders. A copy of the sale catalogue with a prices realized list may be obtained by sending \$2.00 to Frank and Laurese Katen, Post Office Box 4047, Silver Spring, Maryland, 20904.

BIBLIOMANIA BID BATTLE FOR BOOKS

by Jack Collins

It's hard to believe that two months have already elapsed since George Kolbe's now-legendary numismatic literature sale, which was held in conjunction with the Convention of International Numismatics in Los Angeles, June 12 and 13.

For me, it all began quietly on Saturday afternoon, May 22nd, when the mailman delivered a large parcel. After tearing away the envelope, I found what appeared to be a mint copy of a large-size Chapman catalogue. Upon closer inspection, I discovered that it wasn't a Chapman sale at all, but the current Kolbe numismatic literature auction sale.

It was an impressive catalogue, which closely approximated the original style of the famed Chapman brothers and was printed in a similar large format with full white, gilt-stamped covers; also included were eight full-color plates, the first ever employed for a numismatic literature auction catalogue. The text revealed a nearly overwhelming treasure trove of foreign and domestic delights for the bibliomaniac, all expertly described in meticulous detail by George Kolbe. Clearly, this would become the event of the decade, as there had never been an auction of numismatic literature of this magnitude.

As quickly as possible, I turned to the section containing my special interests, which are American auction catalogues. My eyes widened in pleasant surprise as I read through a wealth of listings of plated Chapman sales, mostly in pristine condition. As the run of Chapman catalogues constitutes my favorite series of collectibles in the American auction sales, I promptly started to hyperventilate, froth, and drool all at the same time. There were some choice Chapmans in this sale that I just couldn't live without having. At that point, I would have done almost anything to raise the sufficient cash needed to cover those lots that I wanted. I thought of selling the house, the car, my mother (all right, then how about two out of three?).

As the time grew closer and closer to the date of the sale, it was more and more difficult for me to get a decent night's sleep. Most of the time, I would toss and turn all night, or awaken abruptly at two or three in the morning in a cold sweat. The only way to pacify my unrest would be to turn on the light and reach for the Kolbe catalogue and peruse through the pages until I either drifted back to sleep, or the faint shafts of daylight would penetrate my bedroom. It was both pure heaven and hell at the same time.

Eventually, the symptoms of paranoia began to set in. I became more and more concerned about whether or not Harry Bass and Armand Champa were going to attend the sale, and if what they wanted would be the same things that I was after. I didn't know Harry Bass well enough to predict what he would do, but I knew what a foe Armand Champa could be from past experience. There had to be a way of keeping him from attending. In desperation, I thought of calling him several days before the auction and telling him that there had been an outbreak of Legionaire's Disease in the hotel, and the sale had been cancelled. I also plotted to have him paged just as the auction was about to start. Anything to lure him away.

On the first day of the sale, I arrived early to see if I could find out who was going to bid on what, and how much. Champa and I found each other and reluctantly exchanged greetings. Neither of us was really glad to see the other, at least not there. We cagily tried to pump each other for information, and both of

us feigned lack of interest in the Chapman catalogues, especially if they were going to realize astronomical prices.

At a few minutes after 7:00 p.m., George Kolbe introduced the auctioneers for the sale, Joe Lepczyk and Dave Hudson, both of whom had been recruited at the last minute in substitution for the ailing George Bennett. As the anticipation for this auction was extremely high, I fully expected GFK to welcome the audience with "Hello, Suckers!", which, alas, he didn't.

The opening session contained foreign and ancient numismatic literature that mostly brought respectable prices that were either at or above the estimates, but with rather limited floor activity, approximately sixty percent of the lots were awarded to mail bidders. Several highlights from that session included an anonymous manuscript on Oriental coins, from those of Alexander the Great to modern times, and brought \$2,600 on a \$1,500 estimate. A three-volume set of coins in the collection of the Biblioteque Nationale from Egypt, Spain, Africa, and the Orient, was hammered down for an impressive \$3,350.

While the first session may have seemed subdued, by comparison the final session on Saturday afternoon was full of fireworks. All of the competitors that I feared were there in full force: Harry Bass, Armand Champa, John Adams, Del Bland, and a number of other faces that were both known and unfamiliar. Everyone knew that this was going to be a bloodbath. I just hoped that my blood type wasn't among the others on the floor after the sale! Outwardly, I was the perfect picture of serenity, but my heart was pounding as though Buddy Rich was playing a gig in there. Now I know exactly how Mt. St. Helens felt just before the last major eruption.

A pair of small pamphlets by Daniel E. Groux, published in the mid-nineteenth century, soared to ten times their estimates! This was soon followed by a splendid copy of Crosby's masterpiece opus, *The Early coins of America*, at an astounding \$3,200, after which I feigned a surprised query, "Was that a reprint?", followed by a loud burst of laughter. A similar copy prompted another lively floor battle and realized \$2,500, and was quickly followed by still a third copy at \$1,400. By now, the audience was beginning to murmur. Yes, this was a sign of things yet to come!

Keith Kelman outfoxed several less courageous bidders and was rewarded with a pair of Maris' elephant folios of *A Historic Sketch of the Coins of New Jersey*, selling individually for \$3,500 and \$2,500 respectively. After a lengthy and somewhat heated bid battle between Messrs. Bass and Hanson, Denis Loring captured the prized, small fifteen-page treatise by Maris on large cents, that being the first monograph ever published on that series, and of which possibly fewer than ten copies in all survive from the original printing. That great rarity fetched \$4,500, or as Denis later said, \$300 a page!

More recent American classics included M.L. Beistle's, *A Register of Half Dollar Die Varieties*, a deluxe edition with photographic plates instead of the usually encountered halftones, and was bid to \$550, surpassing the estimate of \$375. Another deluxe reference work was A.W. Browning's, *The Early Quarter Dollars of the United States, 1796-1838*, which was one of only five copies prepared and signed by the publisher, Wayte Raymond. For several weeks before this auction, fellow bibliomaniac John Bergman could hardly talk of anything else in the sale, and he then became the determined successful bidder at an impressive \$3,200, more than double GFK's estimate in the catalogue.

A second edition of Lyman Low's, *Hard Times Tokens*, with fifteen photo-

graphic plates by Edgar Adams tipped into the text, resulted in an amazing \$2,100 final bid, which was exactly seven times GFK's estimate for the lot. In the periodicals section, a complete set of the *American Journal of Numismatics*, uniformly handsomely bound in red half morocco, brought \$6,300, which delighted its purchaser as "the bargain of the sale," claiming that he was fully prepared to pay double that amount. His lack of competition on the lot was, apparently, due to the wrong timing on the part of another buyer who decided to step out into the corridor to converse with a friend. Oh, well, this happens in the best of sales — and this was one of the best!

A complete set of *The Numismatist* from 1894 through 1944, which was formerly in the library of Ed and Kenneth Lee, was knocked down by the auctioneer for \$3,200.

When the Chapman catalogues came on the auction block, I was a basket case. All throughout the auction, a knot was building inside my stomach, until it seemed that I was actually enduring the special effects from the horror movie, *Alien*.

The first of the Chapmans' sales, a small-size plated catalogue of October, 1879, opened at \$1,750, more than three times GFK's estimate, and sold after a single floor bidder raised the ante to \$1,800. The Richard B. Winsor sale, with nine of the ten plates, went for \$1,500, which was equally far in excess of the \$450 estimate.

The John G. Mills catalogue with fourteen photographic plates, long considered to be one of the more "common" of the large format Chapman sales, still managed to bring \$1,750 on a \$750 estimate. Next came an explosive price for the important Harlan P. Smith catalogue, which contained fourteen fine photographic plates, and quickly rocketed to \$4,200.

A beautiful copy of the famed Matthew A. Stickney collection, bound in original white cloth and boards and contained twenty perfect or "unspotted" plates, brought more than double its estimate when it realized \$3,600. When the Captain Andrew Zabriskie catalogue, which featured numerous pioneer gold coins and contained thirteen plates, opened at a meager \$1,000, the room came alive. It seemed for a few moments that everyone wanted to get into the act, as bidders' hands all shot into the air at the same time. For a while, there was only a sea of hands that, from the rear of the room, looked vaguely like picket fences. The catalogue was finally sold for a bid of \$4,600.

Other Chapman sales with plates that sold for more than double or triple GFK's estimates include the Lambert sale of 1913 at \$3,600, the George Earle catalogue of 1912 at \$3,900, the William F. Gable collection of 1914 at \$4,200, the George M. Parsons sale of 1914 at \$4,900, and the sale of the Bascom and Brown collections of 1915 at \$2,800.

A magnificently bound copy of the John Story Jenks sale, with forty-two original photographic plates, which was Henry Chapman's magnum opus, brought a reasonable \$4,100 to an appreciative bidder, who later resold it for several thousand dollars profit. The Dr. Henry W. Beckwith collection of large cents, with seven photographic plates, and bound in white leather with the buyers' names annotated, sold for \$3,000.

However, the auction's star performer was the 1920 catalogue by S.H. Chapman of the W.H. Hunter collection of Indian peace medals, with nine original photographic plates. Although not mentioned by GFK in the catalogue, this copy was possibly the finest surviving example of that sale, which some

researchers consider to be the rarest of all of the large plated Chapman catalogues. The bidding opened at \$5,750, nearly four times the estimate, and was advanced without hesitation by Armand Champa to \$6,000. The war was on between us, with Champa and myself trying to knock each other out of the ballpark with increments that alternated between \$500 and \$1,000. As the bidding reached the \$9,000 level, Champa reluctantly caved in, and I was awarded the lot, which was accompanied by a round of applause. To the amusement of most of those within earshot, and with tongue-in-cheek, I quickly asked the auctioneer, "Oh, what lot were we on?"

The price for the W.H. Hunter catalogue shattered all previous records for an American book or catalogue sold at public auction!

With bids such as these for the Chapman sales, the \$2,000 earned by the catalogue of Thomas Elder's 1910 sale of the Peter Mougey collection, and the \$1,150 realized for a presentation copy in leather of B. Max Mehl's W.F. Dunham collection almost appear anticlimatic.

P.T. Barnum was right when he said, "There's a sucker born every minute!" Well, judging from the amount of bidders attending the sale, I'd say that there was about three-quarters of an hour sitting there!

After that session, most of the bidders adjourned to a reception given by George Kolbe, where some licked their wounds, others tallied their wins or losses, and a few others were treated for shock. As for myself, well, I won a few and lost a few. My original "shopping list" for the sale contained about four times as many lots as I actually got. However, the sad part was that I spent on those few what I had intended to spend on all of them!

From any standpoint, the sale was a phenomenal success, having grossed \$271,765, which is the highest total ever recorded for a numismatic book auction. GFK reports that he has no more regular copies of the catalogue available, but a deluxe edition in white leather is presently being prepared for subscribers at \$85. Copies of the Prices Realized for the sale may be obtained by sending \$5 to George Frederick Kolbe, 23881 Via Fabricante, No. 511, Mission Viejo, California 92691.



SOME OF THE ATTENDEES AT THE KOLBE RECEPTION

Left to right: Harry Bass, Alan Meghrig, Doug Bird, Cal Wilson, Denis Loring, Fritz Weber (partially hidden), Jack Collins, Jon Hanson, Keith Kelman, George Kolbe, Jesse Patrick, Armand Champa, John Bergman.

THE INCOMPLET COLLECTOR

by Forrest W. Daniel

The development of a personal numismatic research library usually begins a number of years after the average person has begun his collection. The latest price catalogues of his current interest are, of course, always kept up to date. Acquisition of a Max Mehl price list or another obsolete volume can be the beginning of the search for books of more specialized knowledge. It is interesting just what will turn up.

How often has the numismatic writer searched for a reference he has heard of several times (one that isn't in the ANA Library) to have it turn up after several years in an auction catalogue. Joy of joys, "Now I can finish that article." His mail bid is a conservative, but reasonable, amount above the cataloguer's estimate. But horror of horrors, some unscrupulous person has submitted an outrageously high bid and taken the book on the next raise. The only hope for the unsuccessful bidder is that there will be one less competitor when another copy surfaces.

It is not the books one doesn't have that make the Incomplet Collector, they are the odds and ends of complete sets bought when they were available, in the simple trust that someday the missing volume(s) would show up to join their lost brethren.

There is no difficulty in locating a complete set of *Diccionario De La Moneda Hispanoamericana*, by Humberto F. Burzio. The trick is to find a lone copy of Volume 3 to go with the first two volumes already on the shelf.

An interesting purchase made at a New York auction gallery was the unbound signatures of *Some Account of the Bills of Credit or Paper Money of Rhode Island*, by Elisha R. Potter and Sidney S. Rider, 1880. It was discovered later that the third 12-page signature has only one sheet, as a result pages 13, 14, 15, 16 and 21, 22, 23, 24 are missing. The odds of locating those pages before binding can be considered fairly slim.

A book sale fiasco at a rural New York auction barn produced Volume III *Annals of the Coinage of Britain*, by Rev. Rogers Ruding, 1817. Even though the other volumes were not in sight, an Incomplet Collector would not leave that numismatic treasure in such pedestrian surroundings.

Given the choice of an illustrated numismatic book printed in the 17th Century and another, Volume 2 of an 18th Century set, which will the Incomplet Collector choose? A fan through each of the books showed the later-printed volume had unusual printing features, so it was the one selected. The illustrations were a key interest in *Catalogue D'Une Collection De Medailles Antiques, Faite Par La Csse Douair. De Bentinck, Nee Csse D'Aldenburg, Dame De Varel, Kniephausen Et Doorwerth, Seconde Partie*, Amsterdam, MDCCLXXXVII — they were engraved.

Space was left in the printed text of the Catalogue to impress the engraved copper plates which vary in size from 22 x 42 mm. to 62 x 124 mm. A number of illustrations also occur at the end of the book, including 21 for Volume 1. Six of the engravings are signed and dated by a variety of inscriptions. The engraver was C. Weisbrod of Hamburg; one of the signatures indicates he also did the drawing, "C. Weisbrod del a sc 1781 H". All of the signed engravings are dated 1781.

Greek types were used for Greek inscriptions on the coins described, but complicated monograms, symbols and ligatures on local coinage were drawn into the text by hand. A semi-swastika from a coin of Gaza is an example. One Punic inscription was hand-lettered. The word "illisible" was hand-lettered twice, indicating that an inscription and a monogram were illegible on the coin described. In two places words, or parts of words, were covered with an opaquing compound and corrections hand-lettered over the errors.

Aaron Feldman admonished us to buy the book before the coin. The Incomplete Collector suggests we do not pass up the misplaced volume just because that set is incomplete; we will experience the same exhilaration in anticipation of a find the beginning collector feels when only a few holes are left to fill in a Whitman penny (cent) board. In the meantime, the full knowledge of a generous portion of scholarship is conveniently at hand for immediate use.

THE REPRINT — DON'T KNOCK IT

by Alfred Szego

For more than one reason even numismatic bibliophiles should take a second look at available reprints.

A weak link in our area is. . . .paper! Yes, the stuff that books are made of. Librarians are mostly of the opinion that our cherished books are destined to simply turn into dust. Even our rag paper may only last about a millenium or so.

This may not deeply trouble bibliophiles who count their expected life span in decades but yet can cause all of us some problems now.

To begin with, sometime around 1870 sulphite process paper came into widespread use. Several numismatic classics were printed on that paper here and abroad. For some reason those books had varying rates of decay, probably depending on climate or storage. Often the pages are so fragile that they can only be turned with extreme caution, if at all.

Obviously reprints of these books ensures their contents continued existence and are valuable contributions to numismatics.

Another justification for the reprint is the difficulty of locating so many rare old classics. Even the well-heeled have to compete and spend much time and energy searching for them.

Finally, wide distribution of these important reference works makes them available to the average numismatist, greatly enhancing the hobby and increasing his or here knowledge.

Paper deterioration reaches its peak in many books and periodicals published between 1890-1915. Books published before the sulphite process was introduced were printed on rag paper and even those from the 16th century hold up very well. After about 1915 paper was gradually improved, becoming fairly durable and relatively longer lasting.

Perhaps publishers could produce small numbers of each of their editions on rag fibre content paper or each work be microfilmed in some duplication. Thus, possibly, future generations would have the benefits of today's reprints as well as modern original works.

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Consequently, I seek personal correspondence with owners of large private libraries so that we can exchange photocopies of sections or entire books on a page for page, or otherwise arranged basis.

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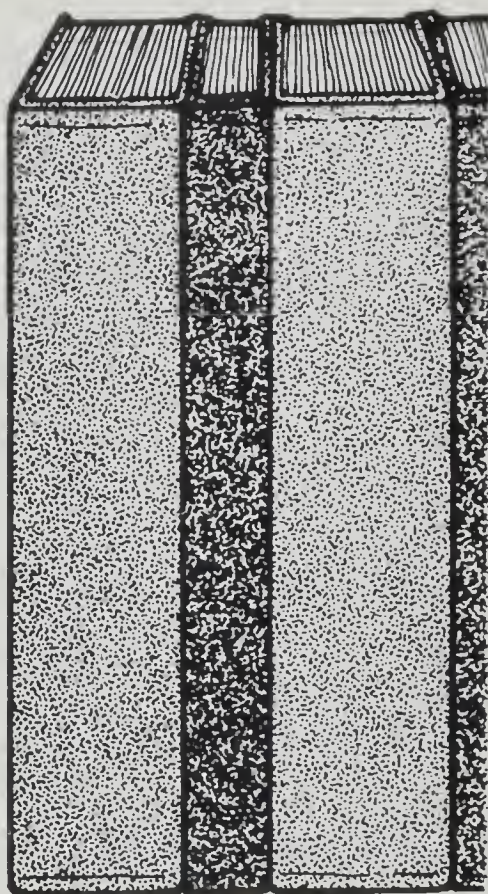
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